

WAGNER NEWS

Wagner News is published by the TORONTOWAGNER SOCIETY

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TWS CALENDAR

Monday, January 19

8:00 p.m.

Stuart Hamilton,
On Coaching Wagner Roles;
Arts and Letters Club

Monday, February 9

8:00 p.m.

Richard Paul Fink
On Singing Wagner;
Arts and Letters Club

Monday, March 16

8:00 p.m.

Bring Your Own Wagner
Recordings/Videos;
Arts and Letters Club

Monday, April 6

8:00 p.m.

Wayne Gooding
Opera Canada at 50;
celebrating Canada's grand
Wagnerian tradition from
Vickers to Heppner;
Arts and Letters Club,
14 Elm Street

Monday, May 11

7:00 p.m.

Annual General Meeting
8:p.m.
Scholarship Recital
Note the change of venue
Heliconian Hall,
35 Hazelton Ave.

Greetings from the Chairs:

What an interesting fall season we had! The director, Tim Alberich, gave us a stimulating account of both *War and Peace* and his concept for the *Flying Dutchman* in London. The October meeting was rescued by our own Wayne Gooding, who replaced the indisposed Russell Braun at a moment's notice, with a wonderful video of the last London *Rheingold* and interesting vocal recordings.

In November we played host to Alexander Neef, the new director of the COC. He described some of his plans for the future of the company and promised at least the first ever in Toronto *Parsifal* in the near future. We were all impressed with his breadth of vision and profound understanding of how an opera house should be ran. We look forward to wonderful years at the COC under his leadership.

The members who went to Bayreuth this year all had a wonderful time enjoying the hospitality of locals, meeting new Wagnerians and mainly being at the mecca of the Wagnerian experience.

For the winter months, we have a great series on singers. In January, the respected vocal coach Stuart Hamilton, not a stranger to our Society, will tell us about coaching singers. Richard Paul Fink, our inestimable Alberich, will talk about singing Wagner (He will be here to sing the Gnome in *Rusalka*).

For the following meeting we will give the floor to our members, who will play for us their favorite vocal recordings or videos. Then Wayne Gooding returns to celebrate Canada's grand tradition of Wagnerian singing. And finally, the spring recital by the winner of the Wagner Society Prize, Jeremy Ludwig, at the Heliconian Hall, preceded by the Annual General Meeting.

Please come and enjoy these special meetings. Happy holidays!
Frances Henry and Yvonne Chiu, co-chairs.

Leslie Barcza // The Far Reach of Wagner; Film Music

Some might question the relevance of film music to the newsletter of a Wagner Society. Others suspect that there is a connection between cinema and opera, particularly the operas of Wagner. Sound cinema is a comparatively new medium. Whereas opera, a hybrid comprised of older media such as spoken drama and several musical forms, is at least four centuries old, we have only been listening to film soundtracks for about 75 years.

Max Steiner's score to *King Kong* (1933) is usually seen as the beginning of the modern film-score. Although the first fifteen minutes of the film has no scoring other than the for opening titles, when the ship emerges from the fog surrounding the giant ape's island, a pulsing orchestral *ostinato* begins that hasn't stopped since. Since that seminal experiment, composers have become the co-creators of the magic of film. Although Wagner had then been dead a half century, both his dramaturgical ideas and his compositional practices continued to dominate the creative landscape; and, as we approach the bicentennial of his birth, that influence continues.

Although film music has been denigrated as hack-work, some of the greatest composers have undertaken film scores. Erich Korngold was brought in by Warner Brothers for the prestige his name might lend to a studio primarily associated with horror flicks and gangster movies. Escaping Nazi

oppression like the other refugees from Europe at the time, his musical language was strongly influenced by Wagner and Richard Strauss. And so it's no wonder that Hollywood scores would employ *leitmotifs* and lush orchestration.

In the early days of cinema—particularly in the silent cinema employing live music performed in the theatre—it was magic rather than cliché when music could imitate action. Although the simple correlation between the diegesis and the accompaniment was denigrated as “mickey-mousing” (for example, when King Kong's movements are mimicked in the orchestral score), the correspondence between music and image was one of the initial signs of musical competence, given that music for silent films sometimes had no connection to the images whatsoever.

Operas also were written for centuries with no apparent connection between the orchestral music and the action being enacted. One can identify, for example, a passage Rossini puts into the Overture to *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, that also serves duty during the last tragic act of *Otello*. By the end of the 19th century, arias and divertissements were no longer interchangeable, but highly specific to the situation. Perhaps the most impressive display of meaningful orchestration was provided by Wagner in the last half hour of *Das Rheingold*, when Donner's ham-

mer elicits not just lightning, but a demonstration of the perfect correlation of stage action with orchestral accompaniment, making the conductor's baton equivalent to Donner's hammer.

There is since that time a broad spectrum of choices available to directors and their henchmen (whether composers or musical supervisors choosing pre-existing compositions). Those who work within Wagner's tradition sometimes emulate his style so completely as to imitate his dramaturgy, as for example in Alan Silvestri's score to Zemeckis' *Back to the Future* trilogy, complete with the magic of lightning striking in each film. Then there was Bernard Herrmann, recognizably Wagnerian in the powerful love music in *Vertigo*, but also employing a minimalist *leitmotif* in his use of a tiny habanera rhythm.

What was once a “new” academic discipline (the study of film music) has grown in the last generation, if the large number of books are any indication. In *Opera's Second Death*, Slavoy Zizek speculated that opera might be dead, replaced by psychoanalysis. But maybe it wasn't Freud, but cinema that took the place of opera, and provides composers with a new outlet, a new home, and a huge new audience.

Richard Rosenman // ‘The Flying Dutchman’ in Vienna

Never before did *The Flying Dutchman* boil down merely to an uneven contest for the heart of Senta – the Dutchman contra Erik; the eternal wanderer against the eternal loser.

Erik, the solid stay-at-home bourgeois and the Dutchman, the mysterious stranger, *ohne Heimat*.

In this version of the melodrama, Robert Dean Smith, who was such an ineffective Walther in the Munich *Die Meistersinger*, only a month before, fit the role of Erik like a surgeon’s glove – the underpowered voice, the non-assertive singing – this was Erik, the whiner, to a dot.

The Dutchman, his counterweight, Albert Döhmen, on the contrary, carried on as he were Wotan, a role he sings elsewhere. A convincing victim of the legend, with authority in his bearing and irresistible wealth, he buys Daland’s daughter with baubles.

Senta, Eva Johansson, filled out nicely since I saw her last, but not voicewise. Though the Ballad was easy and comfortable with ringing high notes, and the duet with Dutchman almost moving, most of the rest was shrill. Senta’s character is well sketched; Senta sees her future outside the reach of her mercantilist father, her boring beau Erik and the easily satisfied spinning companions. There is no portrait in view, we are spared looking at bad art; we

know of it by reference. She gazes at an invisible wall; the portrait is where the audience is.

The mediocre staging, confusing in its maritime symbology did not help. Shirts and ties mingled with sailors’ garb. The superstructure of what was meant to represent the Dutchman’s vessel, looked more like a prosaic tugboat and did hardly suggest a dark Ship of Death. What did work, however, were the regulation undead mariners swarming over the bare bone ribs of the symbolic ship’s deck. Think of a skeleton of a giant herring.

The call and response between the Norwegian sailors and the Dutchman’s crew, the very model of a ballad form (Wagner composed Senta’s ballad first), were further punctuated by coordinated changes of lighting – from bright sunlight of the harbour for the former, to a deathly murk for the latter, in a repetitive rhythm as if reflecting the form of ballad itself.

As for the final act of redemption, the mandatory love-death, I have seen Senta throw herself into the sea, jump off a cliff, step out of a window, or, in other words, perform a variety of suicide schemes. *Hier steht ich treu dir bis zum Tod*. (There is even an anticlimax in a recent Stuttgart production-both remain on stage, with the gathered populace. Stuttgart sabotages her ‘longing

for death’). This one in Vienna, however, was the first Senta’s Immolation Scene, plus the Ring of Fire, a la Brünnhilde: Senta disappearing within a squared ring of flames, filling the stage with a real smoke. This is theft of an idea that shows the utter poverty of the director’s imagination when she rifles the *Ring* for effects that have no place here.

I had hoped to see a production worthy of the excellence of the Vienna Philharmonic orchestra in the pit. I admired the colour, the sonority of the sound and the perfection of the brass, the wind and the storm, but the production disappointed me. However, the hall was packed to its capacity. The Viennese (and the tourists) voted with their behinds, which makes this report sound like sour grapes.

Direction- Christine Mielitz
Staging- Stefan Mayer
Conductor- Ulf Schirmer

Eric Domville // George Bernard Shaw and Richard Wagner: Evolution and Revolution. (1)

According to Shaw, it was “in 1885 that William Archer found me in the British Museum Reading Room, poring over Deville’s French version of Karl Marx’s *Capital*, with the orchestral score of Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* beside it.”(2)

Archer’s version of this crucial encounter in the lives of both men sharpens this description. In Archer’s words, Shaw was studying the two works “alternately – if not simultaneously”.(3) What a marvelous conjunction this conjures up of two of the greatest achievements of the human imagination in the nineteenth century! Will we be able to understand the workings of dialectical materialism through listening to the “*Liebesnachtlied*” or discern in the “*Libestod*” a distillation of the labour theory of value? Despite all attempts to detect any such sublime synthesis I must regretfully report that no explicit traces of this union are to be found in the extensive writings by Shaw on Wagner.

Wagner and Shaw stand clearly linked to each other. Iconoclastic upstarts, both, who began as revolutionists, modifying their stances somewhat as their careers developed. After his involvement in the unsuccessful revolution in Dresden in 1849, Wagner fled into exile which was to last thirteen years. In July 1849, still

much under impact of these recent events, he wrote a pamphlet: *Art and Revolution*. This contrasts the society and art of Wagner’s time with those of an idealized classical Greece: “in its flowering time the Grecian Art was **conservative**, because it was a worthy and adequate expression of the public conscience: with us true Art is **revolutionary**, because its very existence is opposed to the ruling spirit of the community”. A successful revolution would free mankind “from dishonouring slave yoke of universal journeymanhood, with its sickly money-soul” and lead it towards its true goal: “This goal is the strong fair man, to whom the Revolution shall give his Strength, and Art his Beauty”. For Wagner in this essay, such a process is irreversible: “In the history of man nothing is **made**, but everything evolves by its own inner necessity”.

However, for Wagner individually and for society in general, this evolution did not develop. Reaction, not revolution followed. Looking back in 1922, Shaw observed “all the progress Wagner saw was from the revolution of 1848, when he was with the barricaders, to the Imperialist climax of 1871”. (4) Shaw’s own progress to this date took him from the resolute socialism and antiromanticism of the novels to the disenchantment of *Heartbreak*

House (1919) and the qualified revolutionary optimism of *Back to Metuselah* (1921).

In a section of the Preface to *Back to Metuselah* entitled *The Religious Art of the Twentieth Century*, Shaw declares: “Creative Evolution is already a religion, and is indeed now unmistakably the religion of the twentieth century.” The adumbrations of this form of evolution, for Shaw, are works formerly regarded as revolutionary: “Mozart’s *Magic Flute*, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Wagner’s *Ring*, all of them reachings-forward to the new Vitalist art”.

Throughout the seventy-odd years of Shaw’s career as a writer of novels, plays, prefaces and of both music and drama criticism, he engages in an intermittent dialogue with Wagner. In his periodical writing he does not refrain from adverse criticism he deems essential especially of the Wagner cult: “Wagner himself was not a Wagnerite, and I think we have arrived at that period when no person should be a Wagnerite.”(5)

That was in 1892, but already in 1889 (only six years after Wagner’s death and when the Bayreuth Festival was still in its infancy) he had written: “At Bayreuth, where the Master’s widow, it is said, sits in the wing as the jealous guardian of the tra-

dition of his own personal direction, there is already a perceptible numbness – the symptom of paralysis.”(6) Cosima as Fafner – a wonderful image!

One of Shaw’s earliest reviews was of the Wagner Festival of 1887, when the composer conducted a series of concerts at the Albert Hall in London. In a review dated

6 June 1877, Shaw wrote of Wagner as a conductor: “Herr Wagner, as a conductor, must be very unsatisfactory to an orchestra unused to his peculiarities. He does not lack vigour... but his beat is nervous and abrupt; the player’s intuition is of no avail to warn him when it will come; and the **tempo** is capriciously hurried or retarded without any apparent reason. Herr Richter, whose assumption of the baton was hailed by the band on each occasion with a relief rather unbecomingly expressed, is an excellent conductor, his beat being most intelligible in its method, and withal sufficiently **spirited**.”(7)

In 1898 he produced his most important work on Wagner, *The Perfect Wagnerite*.

Everything bade fair for his allegorical interpretation of the *Ring* in politico-socio-economic terms. The hollowness and corruptions of late nineteenth century capitalism – the world of 1883 and all that – with its classes of entrenched privilege dominating

and exploiting the workers through legal, religious and industrial institutions transfer persuasively and often wittily to the realms of gods, giants and dwarfs.

Despite Shaw’s reputation as a man of theater it is noteworthy how little attention has been paid by stage directors to his interpretation of the *Ring* as a possible basis for a production. One might claim the now historic Chéreau-Boulez centenary production at Bayreuth in 1976 as clearly influenced by Shaw’s views. Their setting of *Rheingold* in Wagner’s own time and the subsequent passage of time to the nineteen twenties or thirties for *Götterdämmerung*, the use of Nibelungs as factory toilers and of Hagen’s vassals as the proletariat would seem to confirm Chéreau’s indebtedness. Yet Chéreau disclaims any close connection. Siegfried, for instance, “is not Siegfried-Bakounine as B. Shaw called him. He is the wonderful and irreverent adolescent but he is complete, paralyzed by his ignorance of himself”.(8) Chéreau further asserts, “I am not especially a follower of the arguments of Bernard Shaw, which seem to me inadequate, a little “amateur” in his political reasonings and don’t seem to me to carry very far. They are not at all events of any great use today in mounting the *Ring*.”

Nevertheless, the terms of reference of Chéreau’s staging did

derive in part from the Shavian viewpoint and, in fact, went beyond Shaw’s analysis. In this respect, one might also cite the recent COC *Ring* cycle as echoing, however distantly, a Shavian interpretation.

Apart from his other achievements which inspired festivals (originally at Malvern, latterly at Niagara-on-the Lake), Shaw’s music journalism (usually an ephemeral genre) has stood the test of time – particularly, I would argue, in his writings on Wagner.

1. This article is excerpted from a paper I gave at a U.of T. conference in 1983 to mark the centenary of Wagner’s death. Of the various commentators I consulted in preparing that paper, by far the most perceptive and helpful was Professor William Blisset, a founder-member of the Toronto Wagner Society and still, happily, a distinguished member.
2. Sixteen Self Sketches, 1949, p.39
3. “The World”, issue of December 14, 1892
4. Shaw’s Music, (3 vols), ed. Dan H. Lawrence, 1981, Vol.1, pp.208-09
5. Shaw’s Music, Vol. II, p.533
6. Shaw’s Music, Vol. I, p. 791
7. Shaw’s Music, Vol. I, p. 126
8. Patrice Chéreau, Siegfried Programme Book, Bayreuth, 1977, p. 71

John E. Rutherford // Wagner and Andersen: Contemporary Mythmakers

In Zurich, in 1855, Richard Wagner and Hans Christian Andersen met for the first and only time. They had an hour together and the evidence for what they talked about is minimal.

Andersen seems to have done most of the talking after Wagner had asked for information about Danish opera. After listening intently, Wagner said to Andersen, "... you have raised a curtain for me on the other side of the Elbe", and Andersen, in his autobiography, referred to the meeting as "an unforgettable, joyous hour, the likes of which I have never since experienced."

From the information available, we are unable to say that there was any mention of the *Ring*. Did they talk about the *Ring*? We don't know, but it is more logical to believe that they did rather than that they didn't. After all, the *Ring* was common ground. A year and a half before their meeting, Andersen, in a letter to a friend, commented on Wagner's *Die Niebelungen*, calling it a "noteworthy and highly poetic libretto" that had "already created the greatest astonishment among the small circle to which it was distributed". Surely Andersen might have mentioned that! Furthermore, Wagner, at this time, was immersed in the composition and the arranging of the music for *Die Walküre*. Might Wagner not

have mentioned that?

Also, Andersen might have told Wagner how the ideas expressed in the *Ring* had influenced (or matched) Andersen's own ideas. In 1852 Andersen, in an article called *In the New Millennium*, prophesied that artists and scientists would be responsible for the downfall of organized religion in Europe and in its place the human soul would be nourished by the arts. In other words, the gods must perish so that humans can be fully responsible for their own destinies – and in doing so, become more human. That sounds rather like the ending of *Götterdämmerung*.

Whether or not Wagner and Andersen discussed the *Ring* on that "unforgettable, joyous day" in 1855 may never be known for certain, but we do know that within three years of that visit, Andersen produced a tale using some surprisingly Wagnerian imagery. The story was called "The Marsh King's Daughter". The Marsh King sires a tiny water sprite who, Andersen writes, "would grow into a doughty shield maiden or Valkyrie, able to hold her own in battle". Later, the water sprite is given a ride on a flying horse. Below her, she sees "the heights where the mighty warriors lay buried, each seated on his war horse." She also sees "the great dragon hoarding his

treasure" and "whole hosts of dwarfs peeped forth from their hillocks..."

We are also told that the gods would ride "over the rainbow, clad in steel, to fight their last battle. Before them flew the shield maidens, the Valkyries, and the ranks were closed by the phantoms of the dead warriors... The hour had come when heaven and earth were to pass away ... and succumb to Surtur's fire. And yet a new earth and a new heaven would arise ..."

Unfortunately, the story of "The Marsh King's Daughter" is a rambling confusion of ideas, even including a vision of a "White Christ", and the story is often omitted from selections of Andersen's works.

Did Wagner and Andersen talk about the *Ring*? Too bad more is not known about the meeting of two "ugly ducklings" who became giant myth-makers of the nineteenth century.

References: "Hans Christian Andersen and Music: The Nightingale Revealed" by Anna Harwell Celenza
 "The Wagner Compendium" by Barry Millington
 "Hans Christian Andersen"; stories translated by Diana Crone Frank and Jeffrey Frank
 "Richard Wagner" by Martin Gregor Dellin
 And my thanks to Eric Domville for help and encouragement.

Wagner Onstage: Dec. 2008 – May 2009

Listings correct to November 31.
2008. For further information check
with opera companies via: www.operabase.com

Die Feen

Paris, Chatelet: Mar. 27-April 9,
2009

Rienzi

New York, (OONY) Conc.Perf.:
19 Mar.
Bremen: 14 Nov. 2008- 18 Apr.
2009

Der Fliegende Holländer

Leipzig: 14 Nov. 2008-24 Apr.
2009
Prague: 23 Nov. 2008-4 Jan.
2009
Mannheim: 11 Dec. 2008-6
March 2009
Stuttgart: 11 Dec. 2008-13 Mar.
2009
Basel: 18 Jan. 2009
Monte-Carlo: 23 Jan.-29 Jan.
2009
Kassel: 21 Feb. 2009
London RO: 23 Feb.-10 Mar.
2009
Berlin (DO): 19 Mar.-22
Mar.2009
Chemnitz: 10 Apr. 2009
Dresden: 12 Apr.-17 Apr. 2009
Atlanta: 25 Apr.-1 May 2009

Lohengrin

Dresden: 5 Dec. –10 Dec. 2008
Palermo: 24 Jan.-1 Feb. 2009
Stuttgart: 29 Mar.-25 Apr. 2009
Berlin (Staats): 4 Apr.-12 Apr.
2009

Tannhäuser

Osnabrück: 14 Nov. -17 Dec.
2008
Berlin (DO): 30 Nov. -11 Dec.
2008

Essen: 23 Dec. 2008-25 Jan.
2009
Madrid: 13 Mar5.-2 Apr. 2009
Bordeaux: 30 Apr. 2009

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg

Mannheim: 30 Nov. 2008-13
Apr. 2009
Darmstadt: 7 Dec. 2008-22 Mar.
2009
Hamburg: 21 Dec. 2008-4 Jan.
2009
Amsterdam: 7 Feb. 2009
Barcelona: 17 Mar.-18 Apr. 2009

Tristan und Isolde

Paris: 13 Nov. -3 Dec. 2008
New York: 28 Nov.-20 Dec.
2008
Zurich: 10 Dec. 2008-18 Jan.
2009
Leipzig: 25 Jan.-21 Mar. 2009
Chicago: 27 Jan.-28 Feb. 2009
Milano, La Scala: 5 Feb.-25 Feb.
2009
Dresden: 22 Feb.-1 Mar. 2009
Tallin: 28 Feb.-7 Mar. 2009
Chemnitz: 28 Feb.-7 Mar. 2009
Wuppertal: 8 Mar.-13 Apr. 2009
Wiesbaden: 21 Mar. 2009
Köln: 22 Mar.-26 Apr. 2009
Mannheim: 22 Mar.-19 Apr.
2009

Das Rheingold

Essen: 15 Nov. 2008-13 Apr.
2009
Zurich: 20 Nov. 2008-1 Apr.
2009
Lübeck : 9 Jan.-8 Feb. 2009 ; 28
Mar. 2009
Los Angeles : 21 Feb.-15 Mar.
2009
Hamburg : 1 Mar.-15 Mar. 2009
Tokio: 7 Mar.-18 Mar. 2009
Innsbruck: 14 Mar.-24 Apr. 2009
Remscheid: 23 Apr. 2009

Die Walküre

Hamburg: 12 Nov. 2008-5 Apr.
2009
Lübeck: 16 Nov. 2008-1 Mar.
2009
Karlsruhe: 7 Dec. -28 Dec. 2008
Cottbus: 26 Dec. 2008
Freiburg: 11 Jan.-15 Feb. 2009
Oslo: 7 Feb.-22 Feb. 2009
Koblenz: 21 Feb. 2009
Tokyo: 3 Apr.-15 Apr. 2009
Los Angeles: 4 Apr.-25 Apr.
2009

Siegfried

Strasbourg: 30 Jan.-13 Feb. 2009
Detmold: 28 Mar. 2009
Salzburg: 4 Apr.-13 Apr. 2009

Götterdämmerung

Vienna: 8 Dec.-28 Dec. 2008
Firenze: 29 Apr. 2009
Riga : 24 Apr. 2009

Der Ring des Nibelungen

New York : 25 Mar.
Zurich: 20 Nov. 2008
Stockholm: 20 Dec. 2008
Weimar: 8 Apr. 2009

Parsifal

Dessau: 22 Nov. 2008-18 Jan.
2009
Mainz: 23 Nov. 2008-10 Apr.
2009
Berlin Staats. :6 Mar.-9 Mar.
2009
Meiningen : 28 Mar.-25 Apr.
2009
Leipzig: 4 Apr.-12 Apr. 2009
Vienna: 9 Apr.-15 Apr. 2009
Munich : 9 Apr.-12 Apr. 2009
Dresden : 10 Apr.-13 Apr. 2009
Mannheim : 10 Apr. 2009

BAYREUTH TICKETS

As every year, the applications for tickets to the Bayreuth Festival performances will be available to interested members in good standing of the Toronto Wagner Society, between August and September, 2009.

The program for 2009 will include the following:

Tristan und Isolde, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, Parsifal, and Der Ring des Nibelungen.

This is a unique experience not to be missed by Wagnerians.

The announcement for ticket applications will appear in the next issue of Wagner News.

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They will have a place on a table and be offered at irresistible prices to other members. All proceeds go to the Operating Fund of the Society.

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New

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